

former shipyard workers, especially joiners, electricians and pipe-laggers. But anyone in contact with asbestos is at great risk, in particular off-shore oil workers. Some workers are aware of this but prefer to stay 'ignorant' for whatever motive best known to themselves. Those who speak out sometimes get victimised or called names - 'disruptive elements', 'troublemakers', 'communists'.

But most workers don't even know of the risk, because firms they work for don't tell them. A fair amount of information is available, but the bosses take pains not to let the workforce into the secret. And, too often, union officials play straight into management hands. They think if they get the men an extra couple of quid bonus for doing high-risk work then their hands are clean. An old story.

But the situation facing victims is truly soul-destroying. No longer deemed fit for work, they are tossed on to the scrapheap and, with their families, are forced to face immediate poverty. Most of their time is spent battling the system which does everything in its power to make them give up the struggle. The DHSS, the insurance companies, the medical and legal professions, you would be excused for thinking they were all in it together, involved in some sort of conspiracy to stop justice being done.

The root cause, of course, is greed. Not the greed of the victims, but the greed of the profiteers connected to the asbestos industry. Their power and influence cannot be underestimated. In one year alone the wealthy aristocratic family headed by the Duke of Westminster donated a sum of £13.5 mil-



VICTIMS: Ex-offshore workers Larry Nugent (left) and Bertie Connor are both asbestosis sufferers. Bertie is chairman of Clydeside Action on Asbestos.

lion towards a slush fund, designed to hinder ex-workers from receiving their just entitlements. The highest authority in Scotland is Ian Lang, Secretary of State. Yet he personally stands to lose through his involvement as a Lloyds 'name' if compensation settlements increase.

CAA, acknowledged experts in the field, has affiliated members in Aberdeen and elsewhere throughout Great Britain. Men like John Todd and others have been fighting the struggle for close on 30 years. Yet the amount of hassle they get is an eye-opener.

Intimidation arrives from many sources. The group offers the only counselling and support service for victims and their families while at the same time trying to draw public attention to the gravity of the problem. It receives no State funding. It exists mainly on donations. At the beginning of this year the Sheriff Officers arrived in CAA's tiny office down Glasgow's Briggait, to pound the goods and chattels for rates' arrears (the officials were

so embarrassed by what they found that they crept away, leaving a donation in the 'tea-jar').

Throughout the length and breadth of the United Kingdom there isn't one solitary hospice, no trained medical staff, no specialist hospitals, for asbestos-related disease sufferers. When doctors are faced with patients who have clear symptoms, they don't ask "where and at what do you work?". Instead, they want to know if the person smokes or drinks. Victims are then forced to 'prove' the disease they have is an effect of asbestos.

In this respect they are treated worse than criminals. They get told: "you're guilty, now prove you're innocent." A happy stroke of 'legal luck' for the big insurance companies and all the rest who stand most to gain by thwarting justice. And isn't it a funny 'coincidence' that 99% of successful claims are settled out of court?

But to go into the legal complexities would take a book. That's why we need lawyers, or so they tell us.

A great many patients die as a result of these biopsies. In some cases the death rate is a staggering 7 out of 10. Thus, in the act of providing physical evidence of their condition, the victims of asbestos exposure undergo acute physical suffering, often fatally.

The record is so gruesome that experienced workers at CAA advise claimants to steer clear of the operating table. Victims who refuse the biopsy also get called names - the authorities describe them as 'hostile patients'.

For the purpose of the Diseases Benefit Scheme, the person who finally decides if a victim suffers from an asbestos-related disease is not a doctor, nor is it two doctors, nor is it even seven doctors.

The final judge is the Adjudicating Officer at the DHSS, who holds absolute and discretionary power. S/he takes the findings of the medical profession and then decides if the victim should receive the appropriate allowance. It doesn't matter if your own G.P. tells you you've got asbestosis. The Adjudicating Officer decides whether you've got it 'officially'.

Who is the Adjudicating Officer? Nobody knows. Their identity is a closely guarded secret. Different workers get the job on a day-to-day basis. But some are little more than school-leavers. A boy or girl of 18 or 19 can be Adjudicating Officer. Hard to believe? Check for yourself.

The CAA recommends every worker in asbestos-related employment (and that includes off-shore) receives a CT scan. It costs around £300.00 and isn't available on the N.H.S.

A CT scan provides conclusive evidence of asbestos-traces in the body

per-middle-class professional with no experience of the socio-economic reality. Most of them have never even seen a pair of dungarees. Claims by victims should be assessed by a body of men and women who have an intimate awareness of the industry itself.

What's going on in asbestos-related industry is nothing short of a national scandal; and the part being played by the authorities is a national disgrace.

A joint campaign with the STUC has been launched to lobby the Scottish Law Commission into giving victims of asbestosis parity with England (where bereaved families receive the 'pain and suffering' claim even when their loved ones have died prior to settlement). It's good to see this support from the unions at last. For far too long their "hands have been tied" (yet another 'lucky stroke' for the big profiteers).

Asbestosis victims need immediate support and solidarity. It would be so easy for every union member in the country to donate a few pence weekly. The actual group itself, Clydeside Action on Asbestos, has now gained charitable status. Each member is a volunteer, each one a victim. Without YOUR support they cannot survive. The wealthy elite responsible for such untold suffering have millions of pounds to 'bend' the system. To reverse the process the victims must be given the means to fight back.

For further information, and for anyone requiring advice and support on asbestos-related disease, compensation claims or cash allowances, please make immediate contact at:

15 St. Margaret's Place, Glasgow
G1 Telephone 041 552 8852.